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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the relationship between mothers' ideas about personal values and educational principles and their provision of learning experiences, language stimulation, physical environment, pride, academic orientation, social maturity, and variety of experiences and acceptance for their preschool children. Subjects were 52 three-year-old children and their mothers living in 3 different regions in Spain participated. Variables were measured by the Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment scale (HOME). HOME scores were also correlated to sociodemographic variables such as child gender, mother's educational level, mother's ideas about nature and nurture, and the children's social skills. Findings indicated relationships between the ideas mothers held and the HOME scores. Only two HOME subscales seemed irrelevant to the analysis performed: physical environment and pride towards the child. Higher mother's educational level and family income were related to higher HOME scores. Mothers who were environmentalists and interactionist offered their children a greater variety of home experiences. Children's social skills were not related with HOME punctuations, except for using money and accepting the child. (JPB)

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SPANISH PRESCHOOLERS AT HOME: MOTHERS' IDEAS, HOME AND CHILDREN SOCIAL SKILLS.

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ABSTRACT

The results reported belong to the pilot study of a broader European Research centred on the analysis of the educational contexts of preschool children.

52 three years old children and their mothers (mean age 31) from three different regions in Spain were analyzed. Subjects lived in Barcelona, Sevilla and La Coruña either in rural or urban settlements (21 urban and 31 rural). The sample included 21 boys and 31 girls.

Mothers' ideas about values (for example, being confident or responsible) and educational principles (for instance, show different points of view or punish them) were correlated to punctuations in HOME (Home Observational Measurement Scale, Caldwell and Bradley, 1984). The total score in HOME and its different subscales were included: learning experiences, language stimulation, physical environment, pride towards the child, academic orientation, fostering social maturity, variety of experiences and acceptance of the child.

Also, sociodemographic variables as the child gender or the mother's educational level, the mothers' ideas about nature and nurture and the children social skills (being calm, autonomy in looking after themselves, etc) were related to HOME scores.

Results show that different values and educational principles correlate with HOME scores. Thus, HOME subscale of acceptance correlates with the value of autonomy.

As for sociodemographic variables, the main two ones seem to be mothers' educational level and the family income. So, the higher they are the bigger the scores in HOME.

When ideas about nature and nurture are analyzed, results show that mothers who are more envioronmentalist or interactionist (internal and external influences are to be considered) also offer their children a greater variety of experiences at home (according to HOME scores).

Children's social skills seem not to be related with HOME punctuations except for using money and accepting the child.

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SPANISH PRESCHOOLERS AT HOME:

MOTHERS' IDEAS, HOME

AND CHILDREN SOCIAL SKILLS.

INTRODUCTION

The ecology of human development emphasizes the importance that the context has for children. As Bronfenbrenner has pointed out (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), the systems, that either directly or indirectly affect the individual, have an impact in their development. So, children's development has to be seen from the environment where it happens. Home is one of this environments and probably the most important for preschoolers.

The study presented is mainly concerned with the microsystem "home". But, as we do not analyze development isolated from other variables, the same could be applied to home. Sociodemographic or family variables as well as parents' ideas about development could easily affect or relate to the arrangements of the whole family and the educational context children experience. This educational context is made of objects and activities alone and with adults or other children and, also, relationships and affection are very much implied.

One of the instruments developed to analyze the quality of home arrangements is Caldwell and Bradley's HOME (Home Observation for Measurement of the Envioronment)(Caldwell and Bradley, 1984). This instrument measures the opportunities to learn, the linguistic stimulation, the physical environment, the stimulation for academic and social maturity, the variety of experiences and the acceptance and the affection preschool children receive at home. These subscales and the total punctuation offer a picture of the home as a setting that creates situations to stimulate children's development; although mainly concerned with the intellectual more than the social. That is why in this study we analyze the children social skills (for instance, do little chores or use small amounts of money) to determine if there is still a relationship between HOME and children's social skills in spite of the main concern of HOME with intellectual stimulation.

Research on parents' ideas (in this case we will concentrate in mother's ideas) has proven to be a very important field in the study of adults' cognitions and, also, a main source of influence over children (see Goodnow and Collins, 1990 and Palacios, 1987b).

Parents' ideas is a content area with many subareas. We will concentrate in the values or goals mothers hold for their preschool children and the educational principles they follow in educating them. Ideas may relate directly or indirectly with behaviors but they certainly must be connected with the educational environment mothers create at home (even though the end product do not depend entirely on them).

Besides, ideas about the determinants of development were analyzed. These ideas refer to the attributions parents make when thinking about their children characteristics. Are they determined by the environment children grow

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up in or do they depend on heredity (or some combination of the two)?. This topic has been the major concern for Palacios and his team over the last decades (Palacios, 1987b) and has been related to HOME total scores (Palacios, Lera and Moreno, 1994).

But, as it was mentioned before, sociodemographic and family variables may affect arrangements at home. Palacios and his colleages (Palacios et al, 1994) have not found a relationship with mothers' educational level but, still, the income level of the family or the rural or urban settlement may have to do with different punctuations at HOME.

Also, variables as the age and gender of all the children in the family and the gender of the target child may be connected with differences in the arrangements at home. If parents with three children compared to those who have one trust in self regulation more than direct instruction (Sigel, Mc Gillicuddy- de Lisi and Johnson, 1980; Mc Gillicuddy-de Lisi, 1982), it could be that the opportunities to learn that they offer to their offsprings differ.

Bearing all this in mind, the present study tried to determine if there were relationships between the following:

1. The ideas mothers hold and the arrangements at home according to HOME scores.
2. The scores in HOME and the children social skills.
3. The scores in HOME and sociodemographic variables.
4. The scores in HOME and the family variables.

Insert figure 1 about here

SUBJECTS

The sample included 104 sujects, that is, 52 three years old children and their mothers (mean age 31) living in three different regions of Spain: Sevilla, Barcelona and La Coruña. There were 21 boys and 31 girls and, also, 21 of the children and their mothers lived in urban settlements and 31 lived in rural settlements.

30,76% of the mothers had less than primary studies, 9,6% had finished primary studies, 34,6% had secondary studies and 25% had tertiary studies.

INSTRUMENTS

1. The adaptation to Spanish of the *HOME* (Home Observational Measurement Scale, Caldwell and Bradley, 1984). HOME includes the following subscales: learning experiences, language stimulation, physical environment, pride towards the child, academic orientation, fostering social maturity, variety of experiences and acceptance of the child. Also a total score can be computed.

2. A *questionnaire of ideas* (Oliva and Palacios, 1991) about:

Values such as being confident, responsible, sharing things with others, etc (see table 1).

Principles such as rewarding children, punish them or give them freedom (see table 2).

Determinants of development: nature, environment or the interaction between nature and environment in the following characteristics: shyness, language acquisition and intelligence.

3. A *questionnaire about social skills*: be patient, do little chores, go to the bathroom alone, wash him/herself, go for a walk alone, use money,

answer to the phone and go to bed alone

PROCEDURE

Cities and villages of the three Spanish regions of the study were randomly selected. In each region, preschools were also randomly selected and, the same happened with one child (either boy or girl) in each class. Once the mother and the preschool gave their permission to proceed, the child and his/her mother were studied.

Mothers were interviewed at home about their ideas on principles and values. They had to score from 1 (less important) to 8 (more important) the forteen values included and the twenty one educational principles.

They also had to decide if being shy, talk sooner or later, or being intelligent depend on nature, environment or the interaction of both.

Children social skills were evaluated by their mothers according to the fact that they had or not had them.

HOME had to be scored depending on the mothers's answers to some questions and the observations carried out during the interview to fill in the questionnaires.

RESULTS

1. Results show that there were relationships between the ideas mothers hold about values, principles and the determinants of development and the HOME scores.

Values and principles were factoralized. There appeared five factors for the values: obedience, academic, cooperation, friendship, autonomy.

Insert table 1 about here

There appeared seven factors for the principles: freedom, diversity of techniques and experiences, behavioural techniques, decisions, control, opinion and watch

Insert table 2 about here

Results show that there was a relationship between the academic values and HOME scores in maturity ($r=-.41$, $p<.01$) and between autonomy and acceptance ($r=.41$, $p<.01$). Also, the educational principle of freedom related with HOME scores in academic stimulation ($r=.40$, $p<.01$), variety of experiences ($r=.48$, $p<.01$) and acceptance ($r=.44$, $p<.01$). The behavioural principle related with language stimulation at home ($r=.42$, $p<.01$).

Insert table 3 about here

The one-way anovas carried out to determine the relationship between the ideas about nature and environment and HOME scores, showed that there were significant differences in some of the subcales of HOME (learning experiences, variety of experiences and acceptance) and the total score when considering the determinants of shyness, the speed to acquire language and intelligence. Results showed that whenever the differences were significant, environmentalist (enviroment is the determinant) and interactionist (environment and inner determinants) mothers had the higher punctuations in HOME.

Insert table 4 about here

2. There was only a relationship between the punctuations in HOME and the social skills that mothers reported their children already had. The highest scores in HOME in the subscale of acceptance were found in the families were the mother informed that her three year old child could not use small amounts of money ($p<.05$).

3. There were significant relationships between HOME scores and the sociodemographic variables. The mothers' educational level and the family income related with HOME subscales of learning experiences, variety of experiences, acceptance of the child and the total score ($p<.01$), and also, the maturity subscale related with the mothers' educational level ($p<.001$). In any case, the higher the educational level of the mother and the family income, the higher the punctuations in HOME.

The rural or urban settlement related to the HOME score of academic stimulation ($F(1,50)=4,39$, $p<.05$) so, children from an urban background received more academic stimulation at home than children from rural backgrounds.

Insert table 5 about here

4. The child gender did not relate with the punctuations in HOME but there were relationships between the age and the gender of the children in the family.

Insert table 6 about here

In the families where there were only girls, the scores in the language and experience subscales were the highest.

In the families where there were children older than the one studied, the scores in the language and academic subscales were the lowest.

DISCUSSION

Results show that there were relationships between the punctuations in HOME and several variables. Nevertheless, two of its subscales seemed not to be relevant in the analysis performed: the physical environment and the pride towards the child. It is not how nice or safe the house or the neighbourhood are neither if the mother is proud of, or tender with, her child during the interview that matters (when considering the variables analyzed).

HOME subscales and total punctuations were connected with mother' ideas, principles and values. Being more envioronmentalist or interactionist related with offering children more learning opportunities and experiences, with accepting them more and with the total score in HOME. So, the mothers who think that the environment can affect their children's development offer them more opportunities to interact with it in an enriching manner.

These results and the relationships between HOME and mother's values and principles show a coherent connection between mothers' ideas and the way activities are structured at home. Of course, whenever studying ideas and contexts it is not easy to determine which affects what. It may probably be a combination of the two directions from ideas to contexts and reverse (plus some other unknown variables). Autonomy, for instance, may be something valuable, so the mother accepts the way her children do things, but, also, accepting the way children do things, the mother may see that children are autonomous and that autonomy is something valuable.

Mothers' educational level and the family income were related with some

of HOME's subscales (learning, maturity, acceptance, experience) and the total punctuation. The higher the income and the educational level, the higher the punctuations in the aforementioned scales. Even though Palacios and his team (Palacios et al, 1994) did not found a relationship between HOME and the educational level, it appeared in this study. And, these are reasonable relationships considering the middle-class bias of HOME (Palacios et al, 1994).

There are connections between the structure of the whole family and the experiences and the fostering of children's language (when all the children are girls) and with less academic and language stimulations when there are older children in the family.

When considering the cerebral differences between men and women, language is one of the most mentioned. Also, girls' development seems to be quicker compared to boys'. So, if parents tune their interactions with their children outcomes and these are girls, this could explain the rich linguistic and experiential context found in families in which there are only girls.

If parents with more than one child trust in self regulation more than direct instruction (Sigel, Mc Gillicuddy- de Lisi and Johnson, 1980; Mc Gillicuddy-de Lisi, 1982), it may translate into an educational context in which non-first born children are less academically and linguistically stimulated by their parents, as it happens in this study. We could assume that parents must divide their energies between their children and do not have so much time to interact with each one, or it could be that the older children (or other people) assume some educational roles.

In spite of the relationships found between HOME scales, ideas and sociodemographic variables, them all seem to have no effect in the children's social skills considered. It could be that the precocity in acquiring them depends on other variables or it could be that they are too far or too close to what three year old children can do and do not discriminate between them. It was also mentioned the cognitive bias of HOME, so its subscales may not relate with the social skills studied here.

We know that the direction of the relationship between the variables can not be determined from the analysis performed, but the results show a coherent picture in which the structure of the family system, its sociodemographic variables and the mothers' ideas relate to the educational context in which preschool children develop.

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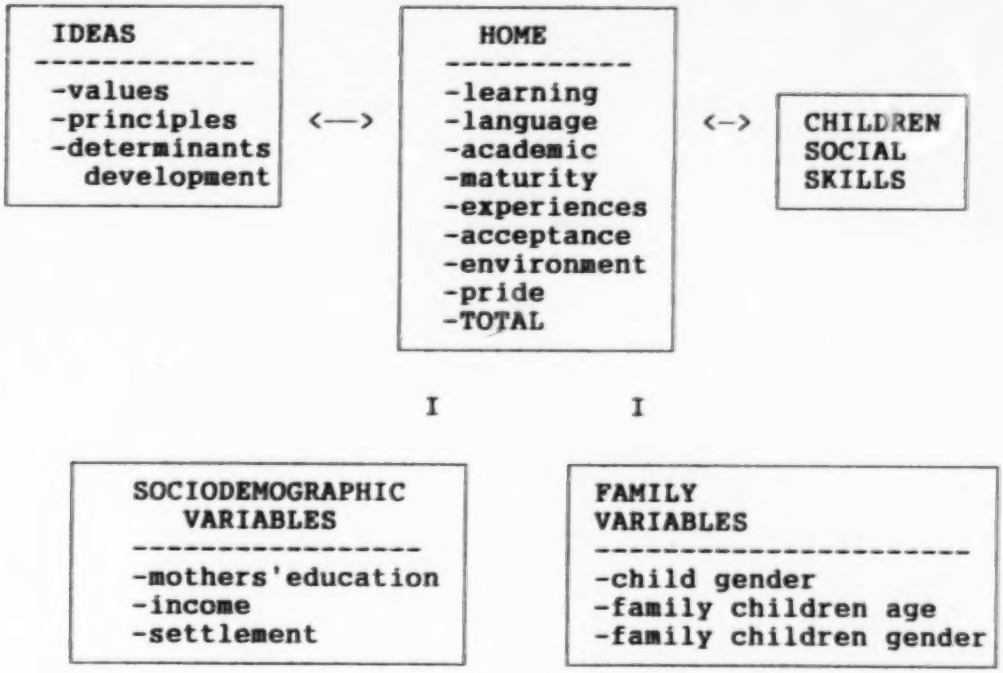

Fig 1. Variables to be analyzed in the present study

VALUES

	FACT1 Obedience	FACT 2 Academic	FACT 3 Cooperation	FACT4 Friendship	FACT5 Autonomy
1. Be confident					.47
2. Not afraid of trying new things					.45
3. Be responsible					.89
4. Share his/her things			.76		
5. Have good friends				.80	
6. Help other children			.68		
7. Obey adults	.84				
8. Listen to adults when talking with him/her	.50 .81				
9. Not oppose to adults					
10. Learn to read and write		.88			
11. Learn to count		.82			
12. Get good marks (at school)		.80			
13. Sing children songs			.74		
14. Paint and draw creatively			.56		

Table 1. Factors extracted from the ideas about values

PRINCIPLES

	FACT 1 Freedom	FACT 2 Diversity	FACT 3 Behaviour	FACT 4 Decisions	FACT 5 Control	FACT 6 Opinion	FACT 7 Watch
1. Reward them			.80				
2. Punish			.77				
3. Control					.82		
4. Strict discipline				.65			
5. Give examples					.64		
6. Watch them carefully							.85
7. Give them responsibilities		.41					
8. Keep them from bad people						.69	
9. Make them feel confident	.54						
10. Let them freely	.77						
11. Show them other points of view		.64					
12. Smack them when behaving unproperly			.59				
13. Let them take their decisions	.78						
14. Let them express themselves						.67	
15. Let them feel loved	.81						
16. Support them	.64						
17. Let them solve their disputes		.53					
18. Avoid their making mistakes				.79			
19. Let them have their own opinions						.58	
20 Put them in situations where they must think		.64					
21. Teach them new techniques		.72					

Table 2. Factors extracted from the ideas about educational principles.

VALUES	HOME SCORES
Academic	Maturity -.41**
Autonomy	Acceptance .41**
PRINCIPLES	HOME SCORES
Freedom	Academic .40**Experiences.48** Acceptance.44**
Behavioural	Language .42**

Table 3. Pearson's correlations between HOME scores and the factors of values and principles (**p<.01).

	IDEAS ABOUT NATURE AND ENVIRONMENT		
HOME	Shyness	Language	Intelligence
Learning	F(3,48)=4,01*		F(3,47)=6,2**
Experiences	F(3,48)=4,3**		
Acceptance		F(3,47)=4,2**	
Total	F(3,48)=3,8*		F(3,47)=3,5*

Table 4. Results of the significant one-way anovas carried out between ideas about the determinants of development and HOME scores (*p<.05 **p<.01).

HOME	Mothers' educational level	Family income
Learning	.44***	.59***
Maturity	.45***	
Experience	.48***	.51***
Acceptance	.47***	.35**
Total	.54***	.66***

Table 5. Significant correlations between HOME scores and the mothers' educational level and the family income. **p<.01 ***p<.001.

HOME	Children's age	Children's gender
Language	F(1,50)=5,5*	F(2,48)=4,7*
Academic	F(1,50)=6,8*	
Experience		F(2,48)=5,02*

Table 6. Significant results of the one-way anovas performed between the age and the gender of the children in the family and HOME scores.